



**4-1 • GIRL GATHERING SAFFRON CROCUS FLOWERS**

Detail of wall painting, Room 3 of House Xeste 3, Akrotiri, Thera, Cyclades. Before 1630 BCE. Thera Foundation, Petros M. Nomikos, Greece.



## Art of the Ancient Aegean

This elegantly posed and sharply silhouetted girl, reaching to pluck the crocus flowers blooming on the hillside in front of her (**FIG. 4-1**), offers us a window into life in the ancient Aegean world. The image is from a **fresco** of c. 1650 BCE found in a house in Akrotiri, a town on the Aegean island of Thera that seems to have been famous for the saffron harvested from its crocuses. Saffron was valued in the Bronze Age Aegean mainly as a yellow dye in textile production, but it also had medicinal properties and was used to alleviate menstrual cramps. The latter use may be referenced in this image, since the fresco was part of the elaborate painted decoration of a room that some scholars believe housed the coming-of-age ceremonies of young women at the onset of menses. The crocus gatherer's shaved head and looped long ponytail are attributes of childhood, but the light blue color of her scalp indicates that her hair is beginning to grow out, suggesting that she is entering adolescence.

The house that contained this painting disappeared suddenly more than 3,600 years ago, when the volcano that formed the island of Thera erupted, spewing pumice that filled and sealed every crevice of Akrotiri—fortunately, after the residents had fled. The rediscovery of the lost town in 1967 was among the most significant archaeological events of the second half of the twentieth century, and excavation of the city is still under way. The opportunity

that Thera affords archaeologists to study works of art and architecture in context has allowed for a deeper understanding of the Bronze Age cultures of the Aegean. As the image of the girl gathering crocuses illustrates, wall paintings may reflect the ritual uses of a room or building, and the meanings of artifacts are better understood by considering both where they are found and how they are grouped with one another.

Before 3000 BCE until about 1100 BCE, several Bronze Age cultures flourished simultaneously across the Aegean: on a cluster of small islands (including Thera) called the Cyclades, on Crete and other islands in the eastern Mediterranean, and on mainland Greece (**MAP 4-1**). To learn about these cultures, archaeologists have studied shipwrecks, homes, and grave sites, as well as the ruins of architectural complexes. Archaeology—uncovering and interpreting material culture to reconstruct its original context—is our principal means of understanding the Bronze Age culture of the Aegean, since only one of its three written languages has been decoded. In recent years, archaeologists and art historians have collaborated with researchers in such areas of study as the history of trade and the history of climate change to provide an ever-clearer picture of ancient Aegean society. But many sites await excavation, or even discovery. The history of the Aegean Bronze Age is still being written.

### LEARN ABOUT IT

- 4.1** Compare and contrast the art and architectural styles developed by three Aegean Bronze Age cultures.
- 4.2** Evaluate how archaeology has recovered, reconstructed, and interpreted ancient Aegean material culture despite the limitations of written documents.
- 4.3** Investigate the relationship between art and social rituals or communal practices in the ancient Aegean cultures.
- 4.4** Assess differences in the designs and use of the large architectural complexes created by the Minoans and the Mycenaeans.

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## THE BRONZE AGE IN THE AEGEAN

Using metal ores imported from Europe, Arabia, and Anatolia, Aegean peoples created exquisite objects of bronze that were prized for export. This early period when the manufacture of bronze tools and weapons became widespread is known as the Aegean Bronze Age. (See Chapter 1 for the Bronze Age in northern Europe.)

For the ancient Aegean peoples, the sea provided an important link not only between the mainland and the islands, but also to the world beyond. In contrast to the landlocked civilizations of the Near East, and to the Egyptians, who used river transportation, the peoples of the Aegean were seafarers, and their ports welcomed ships from other cultures around the Mediterranean. For this reason shipwrecks offer a rich source of information about the material culture of these ancient societies. For example, the wreck of a trading vessel (probably from the Levant, the Mediterranean coast of the Near East) thought to have sunk in or soon after 1306 BCE and discovered in the vicinity of Ulu Burun, off the southern coast of modern Turkey, carried an extremely varied cargo: metal ingots, bronze weapons and tools, aromatic resins, fruits and spices, jewelry and beads, African ebony, ivory tusks, ostrich eggs, disks of blue glass ready to be melted down for reuse, and ceramics from the Near East, mainland Greece, and Cyprus. Among the gold objects was a scarab associated with Nefertiti, wife of the Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten. The cargo suggests that this vessel cruised from port to port along the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean seas, loading and unloading goods as it went. It also suggests that the peoples of Egypt and the ancient Near East were important trading partners.

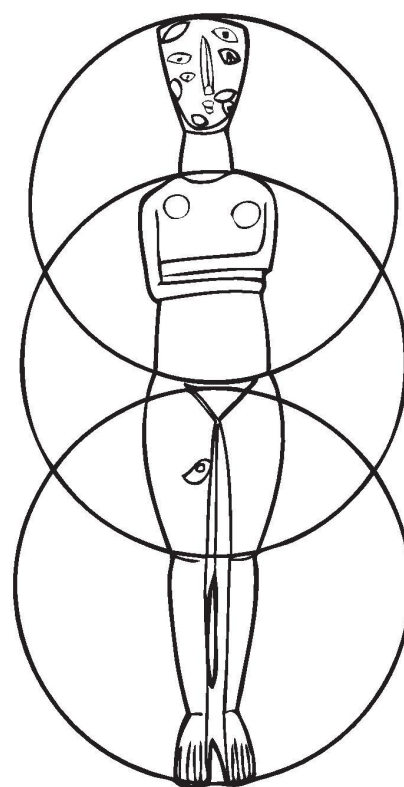
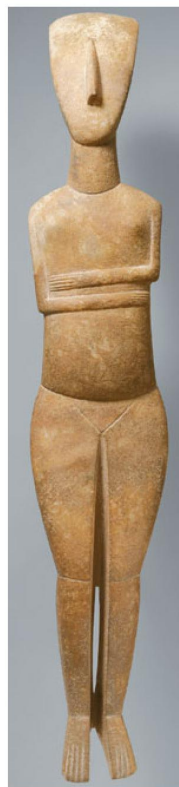
Probably the thorniest problem in Aegean archaeology is that of dating the finds. In the case of the Ulu Burun wreck, the dating of a piece of freshly cut firewood on the ship to 1306 BCE—using a technique called dendrochronology that analyzes the spaces between growth rings—allowed unusual precision in pinpointing the moment this ship sunk. But archaeologists are not always able to find such easily datable materials. They usually rely on a relative dating system for the Aegean Bronze Age, based largely on pottery, but assigning specific dates to sites and objects with this system is complicated and controversial. One cataclysmic event has helped: A huge volcanic explosion on the Cycladic island of Thera, as we have seen, devastated Minoan civilization there and on Crete, only 70 miles to the south. Evidence from tree rings from Ireland and California and traces of volcanic ash in ice cores from Greenland put the date of the eruption about 1650–1625 BCE. Sometimes in this book you will find periods cited without attached dates and in other books you may encounter different dates from those given for objects shown here. You should expect dating to change in the future as our knowledge grows and new techniques of dating emerge.

## THE CYCLADIC ISLANDS

On the Cycladic islands, late Neolithic and early Bronze Age people developed a thriving culture. They engaged in agriculture, herding, crafts, and trade, using local stone to build fortified towns and hillside burial chambers. Because they left no written records, their artifacts are our principal source of information about them. From about 6000 BCE, Cycladic artists used a coarse, poor-quality local clay to make a variety of ceramic objects, including engaging ceramic figurines of humans and animals, as well as domestic and ceremonial wares. Some 3,000 years later, they began to produce marble sculptures.

The Cyclades, especially the islands of Naxos and Paros, had ample supplies of a fine and durable white marble. Sculptors used this stone to create sleek, abstracted representations of human figures, ranging from a few inches to almost 5 feet tall. They were shaped—perhaps by women—with scrapers made of obsidian and smoothed by polishing stones of emery, both materials easily available on the Cyclades.

These sculptures have been found almost exclusively in graves, and, although there are a few surviving male figures, the



**4-2 • FIGURE OF A WOMAN WITH A DRAWING SHOWING EVIDENCE OF ORIGINAL PAINTING AND OUTLINING DESIGN SCHEME**

Cyclades. c. 2600–2400 BCE. Marble, height 24¾" (62.8 cm). Figure: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Gift of Christos G. Bastis (68.148). Drawing: Elizabeth Hendrix.





**MAP 4-1 • THE ANCIENT AEGEAN WORLD**

The three main cultures in the ancient Aegean were the Cycladic, in the Cyclades; the Minoan, on Thera and Crete; and the Helladic, including the Mycenaean, on mainland Greece but also encompassing the regions that had been the center of the two earlier cultures.

overwhelming majority represent nude women and conform to a consistent representational convention (FIG. 4-2). They are presented in extended poses of strict symmetry, with arms folded just under gently protruding breasts, as if they were clutching their abdomens. Necks are long, heads tilted back, and faces are featureless except for a prominent, elongated nose. All body parts are pared down to essentials, and some joints and junctures are indicated with incised lines. The sculptors carefully designed these figures, laying them out with a compass in conformity to three evenly spaced and equally sized circles—the first delineated by the upper arch of the head and the waist, the second by the sloping shoulders and the line of the knees, and the third beginning with the curving limit of the paired feet and meeting the bottom of the upper circle at the waist.

For us, these elegant, pure stylizations recall the modern work of sculptors like Brancusi (see FIGS. 32-27, 32-28), but originally their smooth marble surfaces were enlivened by painted motifs in blue, red, and more rarely green paint, emphasizing their surfaces rather than their three-dimensional shapes. Today, evidence of such painting is extremely faint, but many patterns have been recovered using controlled lighting and microscopic investigation. Unlike the forms themselves, the painted features are often asymmetrical in organization. In the example illustrated here, wide-open eyes appear on forehead, cheeks, and thigh, as well as on either side of the nose.

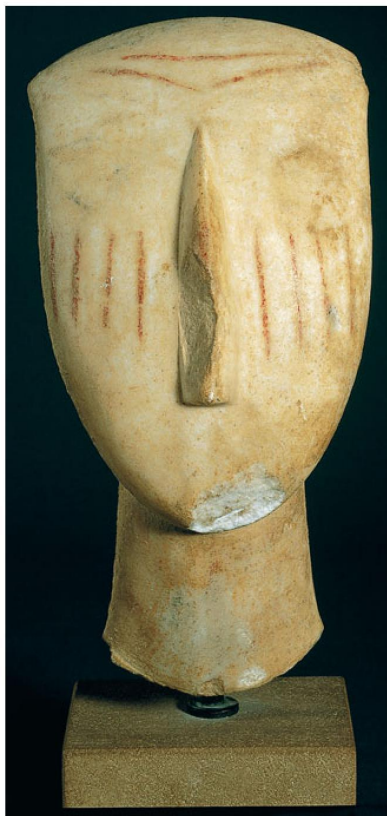
Art historians have proposed a variety of explanations for the meaning of these painted motifs. The angled lines on some figures' bodies could bear witness to the way Cycladic peoples decorated



their own bodies—whether permanently with tattoos or scarification, or temporarily with body paint, applied either during their lifetimes or to prepare their bodies for burial. The staring eyes, which seem to demand the viewer's return gaze, may have been a way of connecting these sculpted images to those who owned or used them. And eyes on locations other than faces may aim to draw viewers' attention—perhaps even healing powers—to a particular area of the body. Some have associated eyes on bellies with pregnancy.

Art historian Gail Hoffman has argued that patterns of vertical red lines painted on the faces of some figures (FIG. 4-3) were related to Cycladic rituals of mourning their dead. Perhaps these sculptures were used in relation to a succession of key moments throughout their owners' lifetimes—such as puberty, marriage, and death—and were continually repainted with motifs associated with each ritual, before finally following their owners into their graves at death. Since there is no written evidence from Cycladic culture, and since our knowledge is hindered by the absence of any information on the archaeological contexts of many works, it is difficult to be certain, but these sculptures were clearly important to Bronze Age Cycladic peoples and seem to have taken on meaning in relationship to their use.

Although some Cycladic islands retained their distinctive artistic traditions, by the Middle and Later Bronze Age, the art and culture of the Cyclades as a whole was subsumed by Minoan and, later, Mycenaean culture.



**4-3 • HEAD  
WITH REMAINS  
OF PAINTED  
DECORATION**  
Cyclades, c. 2500–  
2200 BCE. Marble and  
red pigment, height  
9<sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" (24.6 cm).  
National Museum,  
Copenhagen. (4697)

## THE MINOAN CIVILIZATION ON CRETE

As early as the Neolithic period, there was large-scale migration to and permanent settlement on Crete, the largest of the Aegean islands (155 miles long and 36 miles wide). By the Bronze Age, Crete was economically self-sufficient, producing its own grains, olives and other fruits, cattle, and sheep. With many safe harbors and a convenient location, Crete became a wealthy sea power, trading with mainland Greece, Egypt, the Near East, and Anatolia, thus acquiring the ores necessary for producing bronze.

Between about 1900 BCE and 1375 BCE, a distinctive culture flourished on Crete. The British archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans (see "Pioneers of Aegean Archaeology," opposite) named it Minoan after the legend of Minos, a king who had ruled from the capital, Knossos. According to this legend, a half-man, half-bull monster called the Minotaur—son of the wife of King Minos and a bull belonging to the sea god Poseidon—lived at Knossos in a maze called the Labyrinth. To satisfy the Minotaur's appetite for human flesh, King Minos ordered the mainland kingdom of Athens to send a yearly tribute of 14 young men and women, a practice that ended when the Athenian hero Theseus killed the beast.

Minoan chronology is divided into two main periods, the "Old Palace" period, from about 1900 to 1700 BCE, and the "New Palace" period, from around 1700 to 1450 BCE.

### THE OLD PALACE PERIOD, c. 1900–1700 BCE

Minoan civilization remained very much a mystery until 1900 CE, when Sir Arthur Evans began uncovering the buried ruins of the architectural complex at Knossos, on Crete's north coast, that had been occupied in the Neolithic period, then built over with a succession of Bronze Age structures.

**ARCHITECTURAL COMPLEXES** Like nineteenth-century excavators before him, Evans called these great architectural complexes "palaces." He believed they were occupied by a succession of kings. While some scholars continue to believe that Evans's "palaces" actually were the residences and administrative centers of hereditary rulers, the evidence has suggested to others that Minoan society was not ruled by kings drawn from a royal family, but by a confederation of aristocrats or aristocratic families who established a fluid and evolving power hierarchy. In this light, some scholars interpret these elaborate complexes not primarily as residences, but as sites of periodic religious ceremony or ritual, perhaps enacted by a community that gathered within the courtyards that are their core architectural feature.

The walls of early Minoan buildings were made of rubble and mud bricks faced with cut and finished local stone, our first evidence of **dressed stone** used as a building material in the Aegean. Columns and other interior elements were made of wood. Both in large complexes and in the surrounding towns, timber appears to have been used for framing and bracing walls. Its strength and



## RECOVERING THE PAST | Pioneers of Aegean Archaeology

Some see Heinrich Schliemann (1822–1890) as the founder of the modern study of Aegean civilization. Schliemann was the son of an impoverished German minister and a largely self-educated polyglot. He worked hard, grew rich, and retired in 1863 to pursue his lifelong dream of becoming an archaeologist, inspired by the Greek poet Homer's epic tales, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. In 1869, he began conducting fieldwork in Greece and Turkey. Scholars of that time considered Homer's stories pure fiction, but by studying the descriptions of geography in the *Iliad*, Schliemann located a multilayered site at Hissarlik, in present-day Turkey, whose sixth level up from the bedrock is now generally accepted as the closest chronological approximation of Homer's Troy. After his success in Anatolia, Schliemann pursued his hunch that the grave sites of Homer's Greek royal family would be found inside the citadel at Mycenae. But the graves he found were too early to contain the bodies of Atreus, Agamemnon, and their relatives—a fact only established through recent scholarship, after Schliemann's death.

The uncovering of what Schliemann had considered the palace of the legendary King Minos fell to a British archaeologist, Sir Arthur Evans

(1851–1941), who led the excavation at Knossos between 1900 and 1905. Evans gave the name Minoan—after legendary King Minos—to Bronze Age culture on Crete. He also made a first attempt to establish an absolute chronology for Minoan art, basing his conjectures on datable Egyptian artifacts found in the ruins on Crete and on Minoan artifacts found in Egypt. Later scholars have revised and refined both his dating and his interpretations of what he found at Knossos.

Evans was not the only pioneering archaeologist drawn to excavate on Crete. Boston-born Harriet Boyd Hawes (1871–1945), after graduating from Smith College in 1892 with a major in Classics and after a subsequent year of post-graduate study in Athens, traveled to Crete to find a site where she could begin a career in archaeology. She was in Knossos in 1900 to observe Evans's early work and was soon supervising her own excavations, first at Kavousi, and then at Gournia, where she directed work from 1901 until 1904. She is famous for the timely and thorough publication of her findings, accomplished while she was not only supervising these Bronze Age digs, but also pursuing her career as a beloved teacher of the liberal arts, first at Smith and later at Wellesley College.



### 4-4 • KAMARES WARE JUG

From Phaistos, Crete. Old Palace period, c. 2000–1900 BCE. Ceramic, height 10½" (27 cm). Archaeological Museum, Iraklion, Crete.

flexibility would have minimized damage from the earthquakes common to the area. Nevertheless, an earthquake in c. 1700 BCE severely damaged buildings at several sites, including Knossos and Phaistos.

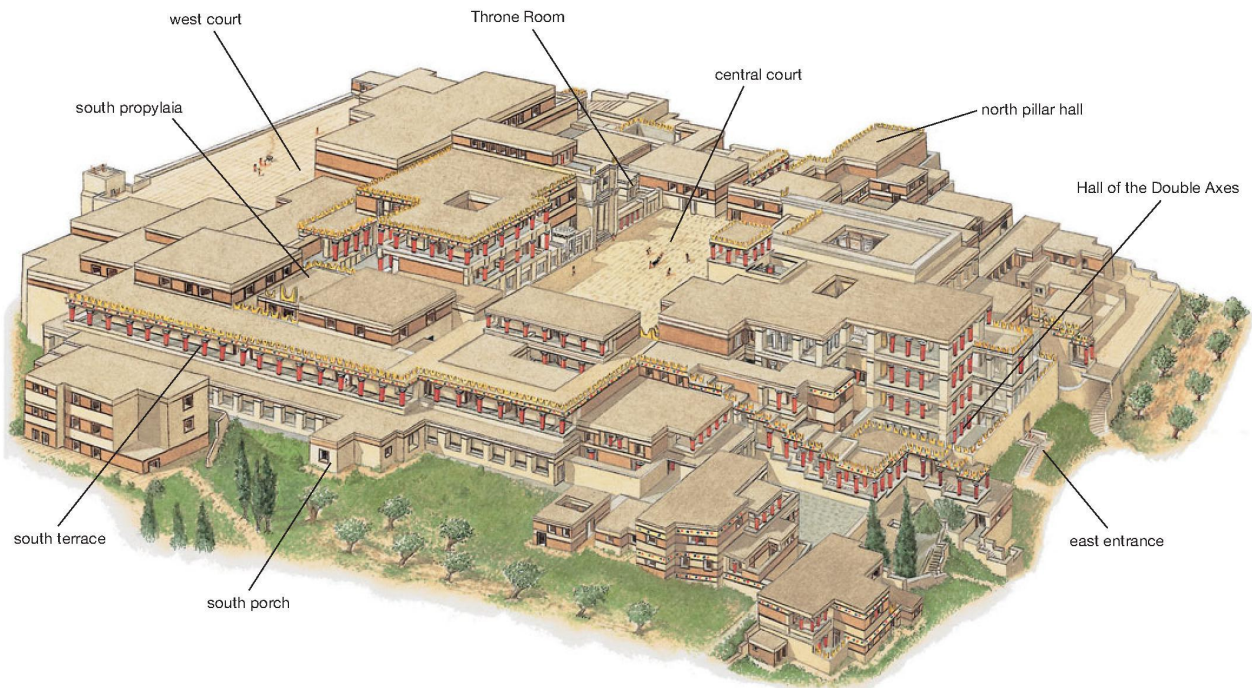
**CERAMIC ARTS** During the Old Palace period, Minoans developed elegant new types of ceramics, spurred in part by the introduction of the potter's wheel early in the second millennium BCE. One type is called Kamarea ware, after the cave on Mount Ida overlooking the architectural complex at Phaistos, in southern Crete, where it was first discovered. The hallmarks of this select ceramic ware—so sought-after that it was exported as far away as Egypt and Syria—were its extreme thinness, its use of color, and its graceful, stylized, painted decoration. An example from about 2000–1900 BCE has a globular body and a "beaked" pouring spout (FIG. 4-4). Created from brown, red, and creamy white pigments on a black body, the bold, curving forms—derived from plant life—that decorate this jug seem to swell with its bulging contours.

### THE NEW PALACE PERIOD, c. 1700–1450 BCE

The early architectural complex at Knossos, erected about 1900 BCE, formed the core of an elaborate new one built after a terrible earthquake shook Crete in c. 1700 BCE. This rebuilding, at Knossos and elsewhere, belonged to the period termed "New Palace" by scholars, many of whom consider it the highest point of Minoan civilization. In its heyday, the Knossos complex covered six acres (FIG. 4-5).

Damaged structures were repaired and enlarged, and the resulting new complexes shared a number of features. Multistoried,





#### 4-5 • RECONSTRUCTION DRAWING OF THE “PALACE” COMPLEX, KNOSSOS, CRETE

As it would have appeared during the New Palace period. Site occupied since the Neolithic period; the Minoan complex of the Old Palace period (c. 1900–1700 BCE) was rebuilt during New Palace period (c. 1700–1450 BCE) after earthquakes and fires; final destruction c. 1375 BCE.

flat-roofed, and with many columns, they were designed to maximize light and air, as well as to define access and circulation patterns. Daylight and fresh air entered through staggered levels, open stairwells, and strategically placed air shafts and light-wells (FIG. 4-6).

Large, central courtyards—not audience halls or temples—were the most prominent components of these rectangular complexes. Suites of rooms were arranged around them. Corridors and staircases led from the central and subsidiary courtyards, through apartments, ritual areas, and storerooms. Walls were coated with plaster, and some were painted with murals. Floors were plaster, or plaster mixed with pebbles, stone, wood, or beaten earth. The residential quarters had many luxuries: sunlit courtyards or light-wells, richly colored murals, and sophisticated plumbing systems.

Workshops clustered around the complexes formed commercial centers. Storeroom walls were lined with enormous clay jars for oil and wine, and in their floors stone-lined pits from earlier structures had been designed for the storage of grain. The huge scale of the centralized management of foodstuffs became apparent when excavators at Knossos found in a single (although more recent) storeroom enough ceramic jars to hold 20,000 gallons of olive oil.

**THE LABYRINTH AT KNOSSOS** Because double-axe motifs were used in its architectural decoration, the Knossos “palace” was referred to in later Greek legends as the Labyrinth, meaning the

“House of the Double Axes” (Greek *labrys*, “double axe”). The organization of the complex seemed so complicated that the word labyrinth eventually came to mean “maze” and became part of the Minotaur legend.

This complicated layout provided the complex with its own internal security system: a baffling array of doors leading to unfamiliar rooms, stairs, yet more corridors, or even dead ends. Admittance could be denied by blocking corridors, and some rooms were accessible only from upper terraces. Close analysis, however, shows that the builders had laid out a square grid following predetermined principles, and that the apparently confusing layout may partially be the result of earthquake destruction and rebuilding over the centuries.

In typical Minoan fashion, the rebuilt Knossos complex was organized around a large central courtyard (see FIG. 4-5). A few steps led from the central courtyard down into the so-called Throne Room to the west, and a great staircase on the east side descended to the Hall of the Double Axes, an unusually grand example of a Minoan hall. (Evans gave the rooms their misleading but romantic names.) This hall and others were supported by the uniquely Minoan-type wooden columns that became standard in Aegean palace architecture (see FIG. 4-6). The tree trunks from which the columns were made were inverted so that they tapered toward the bottom. The top, supporting massive roof beams and a broad flattened capital, was wider than the bottom.





#### 4-6 • EAST WING STAIRWELL

"Palace" complex, Knossos, Crete. New Palace period, c. 1700–1450 BCE.

Rooms, following earlier tradition, were arranged around a central space rather than along an axis, as we have seen in Egypt and will see in mainland Greece. During the New Palace period, suites functioned as archives, business centers, and residences. Some must also have had a religious function, though the temples, shrines, and elaborate tombs seen in Egypt are not found in Minoan architecture.

**BULL LEAPING AT KNOSSOS** Minoan painters worked on a large scale, covering entire walls of rooms with geometric borders, views of nature, and scenes of human activity. Murals can be painted on a still-wet plaster surface (**buon fresco**) or a dry one (**fresco secco**). The wet technique binds pigments to the wall, but forces the painter to work very quickly. On a dry wall, the painter need not hurry, but the pigments tend to flake off over time. Minoans used both techniques.

Minoan wall painting displays elegant drawing, and, like Egyptian painters, Minoan painters filled these linear contours with bright and unshaded fields of pure color. They preferred profile or full-faced views, and they turned natural forms into decorative patterns through stylization. One of the most famous paintings of Knossos depicts one of the most prominent subjects in Minoan art: **BULL LEAPING** (FIG. 4-7). The panel—restored from excavated fragments—is one of a group of paintings with bulls as subjects



#### 4-7 • BULL LEAPING

Wall painting with areas of modern reconstruction, from the palace complex, Knossos, Crete. Late Minoan period, c. 1450–1375 BCE. Height approx. 24½" (62.3 cm). Archaeological Museum, Iraklion, Crete.

Careful sifting during excavation preserved many fragments of the paintings that once covered the walls at Knossos. The pieces were painstakingly sorted and cleaned by restorers and reassembled into puzzle pictures; more pieces were missing than found. Areas of color have been used in this reconstruction to fill the gaps, making it obvious which bits are the restored portions, but allowing us to have a sense of the original image.



from a room in the east wing of the complex. The action—perhaps representing an initiation or fertility ritual—shows three scantily clad youths around a gigantic dappled bull, which is charging in the “flying-gallop” pose. The pale-skinned person at the right—her paleness probably identifying her as a woman—is prepared to catch the dark-skinned man in the midst of his leap, and the pale-skinned woman at the left grasps the bull by its horns, perhaps to help steady it, or perhaps preparing to begin her own vault. Framing the action are strips of overlapping shapes, filled with ornament set within striped bands.

#### STATUETTE OF A MALE FIGURE FROM PALAIKASTRO

Surviving Minoan sculpture consists mainly of small, finely executed work in wood, ivory, precious metals, stone, and ceramic. **Faience** (colorfully glazed fine ceramic) female figurines holding serpents are among the most characteristic images and may have been associated with water, regenerative power, and protection of the home. But among the most impressive works is an unusually large male figure that has been reconstructed from hundreds of fragments excavated in eastern Crete at Palaikastro between 1987 and 1990 (FIG. 4-8). The blackened state of the remains bears witness to damage in a fire that must have destroyed the building where it was kept since fire damage pervades the archaeological layer in which these fragments were found. The cause or meaning of this fire is a mystery.



#### 4-8 • STATUETTE OF A MALE FIGURE

From Palaikastro, Crete.  
c. 1500–1475 BCE. Ivory, gold, serpentine, rock crystal, and wood, height 19½" (50 cm).  
Archaeological Museum, Siteia, Crete.

This statuette is a multimedia work assembled from a variety of mostly precious materials. The majority of the body was carved in exquisite anatomical detail—including renderings of subcutaneous veins, tendons, and bones—from the ivory of two hippopotamus teeth, with a gap in the lower torso for a wooden insert to which was attached a kilt made of gold foil. Miniature gold sandals slipped onto the small, tapering feet. The head was carved of gray serpentine with inset eyes of rock crystal, just as inlaid wooden nipples detail the figure's torso. The ivory and gold may have been imported—perhaps from Egypt—but the style is characteristically Minoan (compare FIG. 4-7). We know very little about the context and virtually nothing about the meaning or use of this figure but the nature of the materials and the large size suggest that it was important. Some have interpreted this as the cult statue of a young god; others have proposed it was a votive effigy for a religious ceremony; but these remain speculations.

**STONE RHYTONS** Almost certainly of ritual significance are a series of stone **rhytons**—vessels used for pouring liquids—that Minoans carved from steatite (a greenish or brown soapstone) and



#### 4-9 • TWO VIEWS OF THE HARVESTER RHYTON

From Hagia Triada, Crete. New Palace period, c. 1650–1450 BCE.  
Steatite, greatest diameter 4½" (11.3 cm). Archaeological Museum, Iraklion, Crete.





#### 4-10 • BULL'S-HEAD RHYTON

From Knossos, Crete. New Palace period, c. 1550–1450 BCE. Serpentine with shell, rock crystal, and red jasper; the gilt-wood horns are restorations, height 12" (30.5 cm). Archaeological Museum, Iraklion, Crete.

serpentine (usually dull green in color). These have been found in fragments and reconstructed by archaeologists. **THE HARVESTER RHYTON** was a cone-shaped vessel (only the upper part is preserved) barely 4½ inches in diameter (FIG. 4-9). It may have been covered with gold leaf, sheets of hammered gold (see "Aegean Metalwork," page 90).

A rowdy procession of 27 men has been crowded onto its curving surface. The piece is exceptional for the freedom with which the figures occupy three-dimensional space, overlapping and jostling one another instead of marching in orderly, patterned single file across the surface in the manner of some Near Eastern or Egyptian art. The exuberance of this scene is especially notable in the emotions expressed on the men's faces. They march and chant to the beat of a *sistrum*—a rattlike percussion instrument—elevated in the hands of a man whose wide-open mouth seems to signal singing at the top of his lungs. The men have large, bold features and sinewy bodies so trim we can see their ribs. One man stands out from the crowd because of his long hair, scale-covered

ceremonial cloak, and commanding staff. Is he the leader of this enthusiastic band, or is he following along behind them? Archaeologists have proposed a variety of interpretations for the scene—a spring planting or fall harvest festival, a religious procession, a dance, a crowd of warriors, or a gang of forced laborers.

As we have seen, bulls are a recurrent theme in Minoan art, and rhytons were also made in the form of a bull's head (FIG. 4-10). The sculptor carved this one from a block of greenish-black serpentine to create an image that approaches animal portraiture. Lightly engraved lines, filled with white powder to make them visible, enliven the animal's coat: short, curly hair on top of the head; longer, shaggy strands on the sides; and circular patterns along the neck suggest its dappled coloring. White bands of shell outline the nostrils, and painted rock crystal and red jasper form the eyes. The horns (here restored) were made of wood covered with gold leaf. This rhyton was filled with liquid through a hole in the bull's neck, and during ritual libations, fluid flowed out from its mouth.

**CERAMIC ARTS** The ceramic arts, so splendidly realized early on in Kamares ware, continued throughout the New Palace period. Some of the most striking ceramics are characterized as "Marine style," because of the depictions of sea life on their surfaces. In a stoppered bottle of this type known as the **OCTOPUS FLASK**, made about 1500–1450 BCE (FIG. 4-11), the painter created a dynamic arrangement of marine life, in



#### 4-11 • OCTOPUS FLASK

From Palaikastro, Crete. New Palace period, c. 1500–1450 BCE. Marine-style ceramic, height 11" (28 cm). Archaeological Museum, Iraklion, Crete.



## TECHNIQUE | Aegean Metalwork

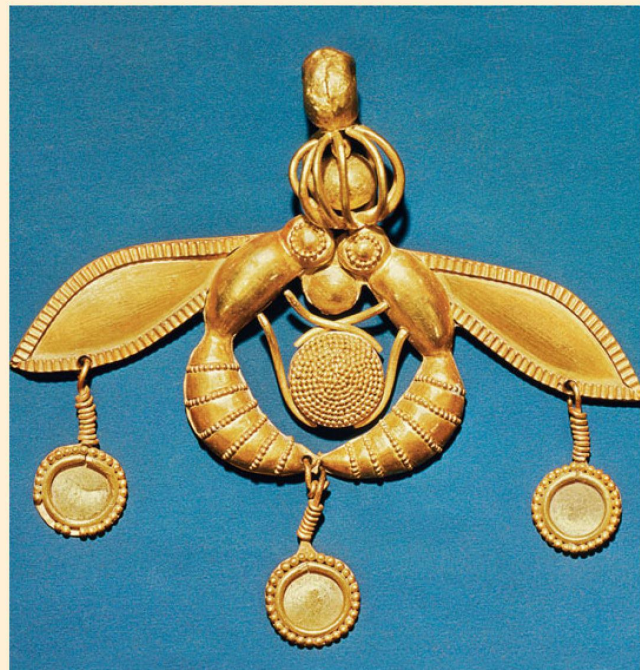
Aegean artists created exquisite luxury goods from imported gold. Their techniques included lost-wax casting (see “Lost-Wax Casting,” page 418), inlay, filigree, granulation, repoussé, niello, and gilding.

The early Minoan pendant with a pair of gold bees shown here (FIG. 4-12) exemplifies early sophistication in **filigree** (delicate decoration with fine wires) and **granulation** (minute granules or balls of precious metal fused to underlying forms), the latter used to enliven the surfaces and to outline or even create three-dimensional shapes.

The Vapheio Cup (see FIG. 4-13) and the funerary mask (see FIG. 4-20) are examples of **repoussé**, in which artists gently pushed up relief forms (perhaps by hammering) from the back of a thin sheet of gold. Experienced goldsmiths may have formed simple designs freehand, or used standard wood forms or punches. For more elaborate decorations they would first have sculpted the entire design in wood or clay and then used this form as a mold for the gold sheet.


The artists who created the Mycenaean dagger blade (see FIG. 4-21) not only inlaid one metal into another, but also employed a special technique called **niello**, still a common method of metal decoration. Powdered nigellum—a black alloy of lead, silver, and copper with sulfur—was rubbed into very fine engraved lines in a silver or gold surface, then fused to the surrounding metal with heat. The resulting lines appear as black drawings.

**Gilding**—the application of gold to an object made of some other material—was a technically demanding process by which paper-thin sheets of hammered gold called gold leaf (or, if very thin, gold foil) were meticulously affixed to the surface to be gilded. Gold sheets may once have covered the now-bare stone surface of the Harvester Rhyton (see FIG. 4-9) as well as the lost wooden horns of the Bull’s-head Rhyton (see FIG. 4-10).



**4-12 • PENDANT OF GOLD BEES**

From Chryssolakkos, near Mallia, Crete. Old Palace period, c. 1700–1550 BCE. Gold, height approx.  $1\frac{3}{16}$ " (4.6 cm). Archaeological Museum, Iraklion, Crete.

 **Watch** a video about the process of lost-wax casting on [myartslab.com](http://myartslab.com)

seeming celebration of Minoan maritime prowess. Like microscopic life teeming in a drop of pond water, sea creatures float around an octopus’s tangled tentacles. The decoration on the Kamares ware jug (see FIG. 4-4) had reinforced the solidity of its surface, but here the pottery surface seems to dissolve. The painter captured the grace and energy of natural forms while presenting them as a stylized design in calculated harmony with the vessel’s bulging shape.

**METALWORK** By about 1700 BCE, Aegean metalworkers were producing objects that rivaled those of Near Eastern and Egyptian jewelers, whose techniques they may have learned and adopted. For a pendant in gold found at Chryssolakkos (see “Aegean Metalwork,” above), the artist arched a pair of easily recognizable but geometrically stylized bees (or perhaps wasps) around a honeycomb of gold granules, providing their sleek bodies with a single pair of outspread wings. The pendant hangs from a spider-like filigree form, with what appear to be long legs encircling a tiny gold ball. Small disks dangle from the ends of the wings and the point where the insects’ bodies meet.

### THE SPREAD OF MINOAN CULTURE

About 1450 BCE, a conquering people from mainland Greece, known as Mycenaeans, arrived in Crete. They occupied the buildings at Knossos and elsewhere until a final catastrophe and the destruction of Knossos about 1375 BCE caused them to abandon the site. But by 1400 BCE, the center of political and cultural power in the Aegean had shifted to mainland Greece.

The skills of Minoan artists, particularly metalsmiths, had made them highly sought after on the mainland. A pair of magnificent gold cups found in a large tomb at Vapheio, on the Greek mainland south of Sparta, were made sometime between 1650 and 1450 BCE, either by Minoan artists or by locals trained in Minoan style and techniques. One side of one cup is shown here (FIG. 4-13). The relief designs were executed in repoussé—the technique of pushing up the metal from the back of the sheet. The handles were attached with rivets, and the cup was then lined with sheet gold. In the scenes circling the cups, men are depicted trying to capture bulls in various ways. Here, a scantily clad man has roped a bull’s hind leg. The figures dominate the landscape and bulge from the surface with a muscular vitality that belies the cup’s





#### 4-13 • VAPHEIO CUP

One of two cups found near Sparta, Greece. c. 1650–1450 BCE. Gold, height 4½" (11.3 cm). National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

small size—it is only 4½ inches tall. The depiction of olive trees could indicate that the scene is set in a sacred grove. Could the cups illustrate exploits in some long-lost heroic tale, or are they commonplace herding scenes?

**WALL PAINTING AT AKROTIRI ON THERA** Minoan cultural influences seem to have spread to the Cyclades as well as mainland Greece. Thera, for example, was so heavily under Crete's influence in the New Palace period that it was a veritable outpost of Minoan culture. A girl picking crocuses in a fresco in a house at Akrotiri (see FIG. 4-1) wears the typically colorful Minoan flounced skirt with a short-sleeved, open-breasted bodice, large earrings, and bracelets. This wall painting demonstrates the sophisticated decorative sense found in Minoan art, both in color selection and in surface detail. The room in which this painting appears seems to have been dedicated to young women's coming-of-age ceremonies, and its frescos provide the visual context for ritual activity, just like the courtyard of the architectural complexes in Crete.

In another Akrotiri house, an artist has created an imaginative landscape of hills, rocks, and flowers (FIG. 4-14), the first pure landscape painting we have encountered in ancient art. A viewer standing in the center of the room is surrounded by orange, rose, and blue rocky hillocks sprouting oversized deep-red lilies. Swallows, sketched by a few deft lines, swoop above and around the flowers. The artist unifies the rhythmic flow of the undulating landscape, the stylized patterning imposed on the natural forms, and the decorative use of bright colors alternating with darker, neutral tones, which were perhaps meant to represent areas of



#### 4-14 • LANDSCAPE ("SPRING FRESCO")

Wall painting with areas of modern reconstruction, from Akrotiri, Thera, Cyclades. Before 1630 BCE. National Archaeological Museum, Athens.



## A CLOSER LOOK | The “Flotilla Fresco” from Akrotiri

Detail of the left part of a mural from Room 5 of West House, Akrotiri, Thera.

New Palace period, c. 1650 BCE. Height 14 $\frac{5}{16}$ " (44 cm). National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

The depiction of lions chasing deer, perhaps signifying heroism or political power, has a long history in Aegean art.

This block of land at the left seems to represent one of two spits of land in Thera that separate the sea from an enclosed area of water within a volcanic caldera at the center of the island. Both the volcanic quality of the painted rocks as well as their division into horizontal registers as bands of color reproduce the actual geological appearance of this terrain.

The arrangement of ships and leaping dolphins in the central part of the mural uses vertical perspective (see Starter Kit, p. xxiii) to indicate recession into depth. In this system, higher placement is given to things that are in the distance, while those placed lower are closer to the viewer.



 **View** the Closer Look for the “Flotilla Fresco” from Akrotiri on myartslab.com

shadow. The colors may seem fanciful to us, but sailors today who know the area well attest to their accuracy, suggesting that these artists recorded the actual colors of Thera’s wet rocks in the sunshine, a zestful celebration of the natural world. How different this is from the cool, stable elegance of Egyptian wall painting!

Direct references to the geology of Thera also appear in a long strip of wall painting known as the “Flotilla Fresco” (see “A Closer Look,” above) running along the tops of the walls in the room of a house in Akrotiri, a domestic context comparable to that of the fresco of the girl gathering crocuses. This expansive tableau was for years interpreted as a long-distance voyage with a martial flavor, but recently art historian Thomas Strasser has argued convincingly that this is a specific seascape viewed from the eastern interior of the island of Thera itself, looking toward the western opening between two peninsular mountainous landmasses created by a volcanic caldera and at the open sea, populated by festive local ships and the dolphins that leap around them. Rather than serving as the setting for a military expedition, the land and sea of Thera itself may be the principal subject of this painting.

## THE MYCENAEAN (HELLADIC) CULTURE

Archaeologists use the term *Helladic* (from *Hellas*, the Greek name for Greece) to designate the Aegean Bronze Age on mainland Greece. The Helladic period extends from about 3000 to 1000 BCE, concurrent with Cycladic and Minoan cultures. In the early part of the Aegean Bronze Age, Greek-speaking peoples, probably from the northwest, moved into the area. They brought with them advanced techniques for metalworking, ceramics, and architectural design, and they displaced the local Neolithic culture. Later in the Aegean Bronze Age, the people of the mainland city of Mycenae rose to power and extended their influence into the Aegean islands as well.

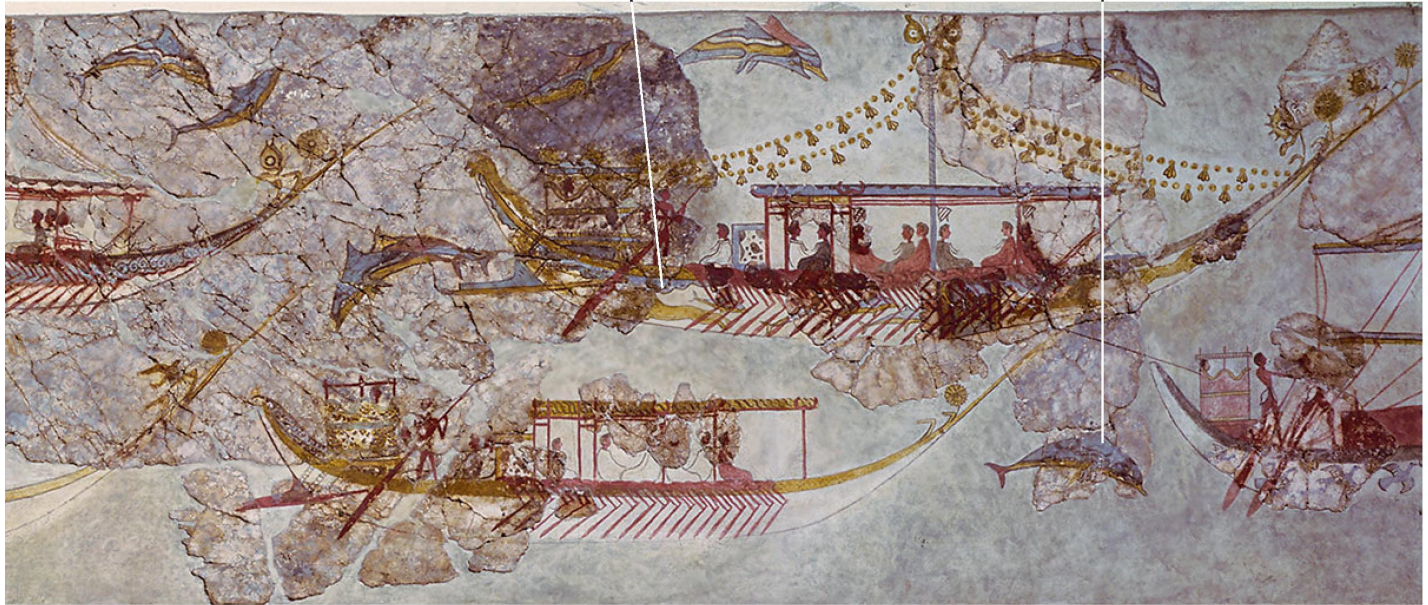
### HELLADIC ARCHITECTURE

Mycenaean architecture developed in distinct ways from that of the Minoans. Mycenaeans built fortified strongholds called citadels to protect the palaces of their rulers. These palaces contained a



Each of the seven vessels of the fleet on this fresco (only four can be seen in this partial view) is unique, differing in size, decoration (this one has lions painted on its side), and rigging. It has been suggested that this tableau represents a single moment from a nautical festival, perhaps a spring ceremony to kick off a new season of sailing.

Note the difference between the surviving fragments of the original fresco and the modern infill in this restored presentation of a dolphin swimming alongside the ships.



characteristic architectural unit called a **megaron** that was axial in plan, consisting of a large room, entered through a porch with columns, and sometimes a vestibule. The Mycenaean also buried their dead in magnificent vaulted tombs, round in floor plan and crafted of cut stone.

**MYCENAE** Later Greek writers called the walled complex of Mycenae (FIGS. 4-15, 4-16) the home of Agamemnon, legendary Greek king and leader of the Greek army that conquered the great city of Troy, as described in Homer's epic poem, the *Iliad*. The site was occupied from the Neolithic period to around 1050 BCE. Even today, the monumental gateway to the citadel at Mycenae is an impressive reminder of the importance of the city. The walls were rebuilt three times—c. 1340 BCE, c. 1250 BCE, and c. 1200 BCE—each time stronger than the last and enclosing more space. The second wall, of c. 1250 BCE, enclosed an earlier grave circle and was pierced by two gates, the monumental “Lion Gate” (see FIG. 4-17) on the west and a smaller secondary, rear gate on the northeast side. The final walls were extended about 1200 BCE

to protect the water supply, an underground cistern. These walls were about 25 feet thick and nearly 30 feet high. Their drywall masonry, using largely unworked boulders, is known as **cyclopean**, because it was believed that only the enormous Cyclops (legendary one-eyed giants) could have moved such massive stones.

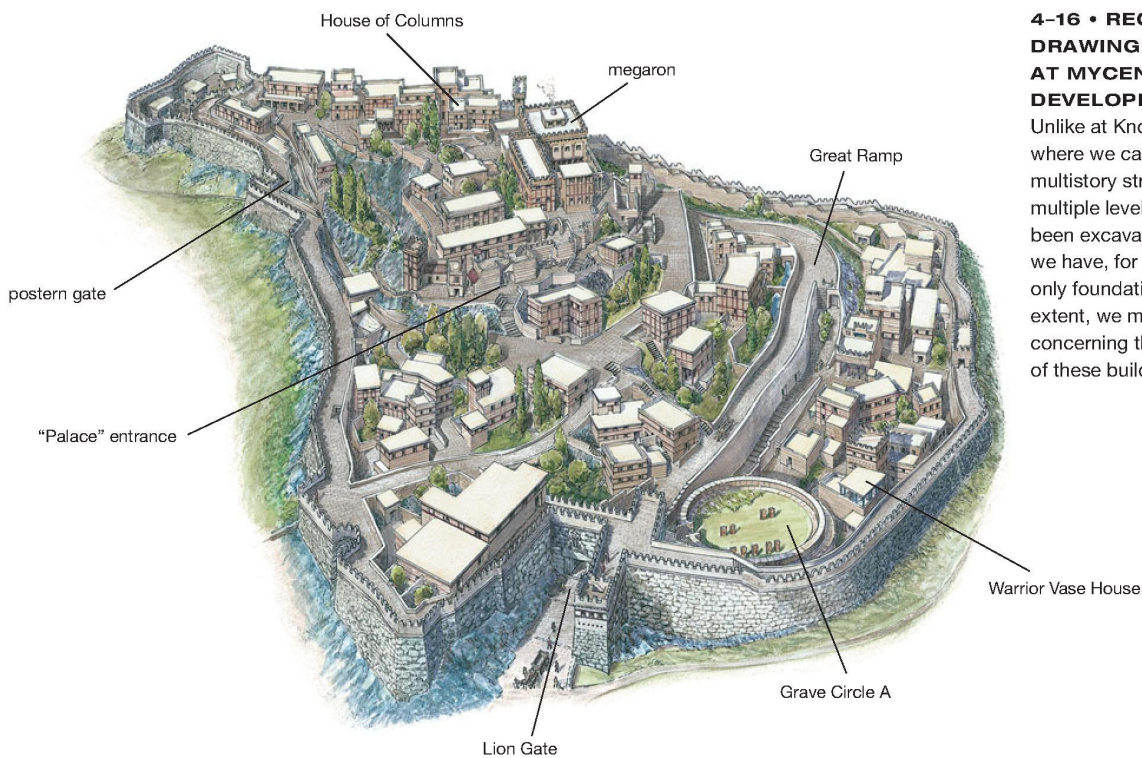
As in Near Eastern citadels, the Lion Gate was provided with guardian figures, which stand above the door rather than to the sides in the door jambs. From this gate, the Great Ramp led up the hillside, past the grave circle, to the courtyard for the building occupying the highest point in the center of the city, which may have been the residence of a ruler. From the courtyard one entered a porch, a vestibule, and finally the megaron, which seems to be the intended destination, in contrast to Minoan complexes where the courtyard itself seems to be the destination. The great room of a typical megaron had a central hearth surrounded by four large columns that supported the ceiling. The roof above the hearth was probably raised to admit light and air and permit smoke to escape (see FIGS. 4-18, 4-19). Some architectural historians think that the megaron eventually came to be associated with royalty. The later





#### 4-15 • CITADEL AT MYCENAE

Peloponnese, Greece. Aerial view. Site occupied c. 1600–1200 BCE; walls built c. 1340, 1250, 1200 BCE, creating a progressively larger enclosure.



#### 4-16 • RECONSTRUCTION DRAWING OF THE CITADEL AT MYCENAE AT ITS MOST DEVELOPED STATE

Unlike at Knossos and Akrotiri, where we can understand multistory structures because multiple levels survived and have been excavated, at Mycenae we have, for the most part, only foundations. To a certain extent, we must conjecture concerning the upper portions of these buildings.



## A BROADER LOOK | The Lion Gate

One of the most imposing survivals from the Helladic Age is the gate to the city of Mycenae. The gate is today a simple opening, but its importance is indicated by the very material of the flanking walls, a conglomerate stone that can be polished to glistening multicolors. A corbeled relieving **arch** above the lintel forms a triangle filled with a limestone panel bearing a grand heraldic composition—guardian beasts flanking a single Minoan column that swells upward to a large, bulbous capital.

The archival photograph (FIG. 4-17) shows a group posing jauntily outside the gate. Visible is Heinrich Schliemann (standing at the left of the gate) and his wife and partner in archaeology, Sophia (sitting at the right). Schliemann had already “discovered” Troy,

and when he turned his attention to Mycenae in 1876, he unearthed graves containing rich treasures, including gold masks. The grave circle he excavated lay just inside the Lion Gate (see FIG. 4-16).

The Lion Gate has been the subject of much speculation in recent years. What are the animals? What does the architectural feature mean? How is the imagery to be interpreted? The beasts supporting and defending the column are magnificent, supple creatures rearing up on hind legs. Their faces must once have been turned toward the visitor, but today only the attachment holes indicate the presence of their heads.

What were they—lions or lionesses? One scholar points out that since the beasts have

neither teats nor penises, it is impossible to say. The beasts do not even have to be felines. They could have had eagle heads, which would make them griffins, in which case should they not also have wings? They could have had human heads, and that would turn them into sphinxes. Pausanias, a Greek traveler who visited Mycenae in the second century CE, described a gate guarded by lions. Did he see the now-missing heads? And since mixed-media sculpture—ivory and gold, marble and wood—was common in the ancient Aegean, one could imagine heads created from other materials—perhaps gold. Such heads would have gleamed and glowered out at the visitor. And if the stone sculpture was painted, as most was, the gold would not have seemed out of place.

A metaphor for power, the lions rest their feet on Minoan-style altars. Between them stands the mysterious Minoan column, also on the altar base. Clearly the Mycenaeans are borrowing symbolic vocabulary from Crete. But what does this composition mean? Scholars do not agree. Is it a temple? A palace? The entire city? Or the god of the place? The column and capital support a lintel or architrave, which in turn supports the butt ends of logs forming rafters of the horizontal roof, so the most likely theory is that the structure is the symbol of a palace or a temple. But some scholars suggest that by extension it becomes the symbol of a king or a deity. If so, the imagery of the Lion Gate, with its combination of guardian beasts and divine or royal palace, signifies the legitimate power of the ruler of Mycenae.



**4-17 • LION GATE, MYCENAE**

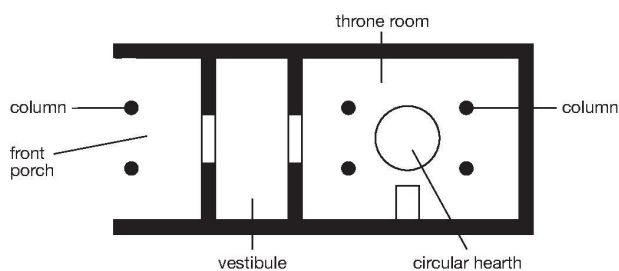
c. 1250 BCE. Historic photo showing Heinrich and Sophia Schliemann.



Greeks adapted its form when building temples, which they saw as earthly palaces for their gods.

**PYLOS** The rulers of Mycenae fortified their city, but the people of Pylos, in the extreme southwest of the Peloponnese, perhaps felt that their more remote and defensible location made them less vulnerable to attack. This seems not to have been the case, for within a century of its construction in c. 1340 BCE, the palace at Pylos was destroyed by fires, apparently set during the violent upheavals that brought about the collapse of Mycenae itself.

The architectural complex at Pylos was built on a raised site



**4-18 • PLAN OF THE MEGARON OF THE PYLOS PALACE**  
c. 1300–1200 BCE.

without fortifications, and it was organized around a special area that included an archive, storerooms, workshops, and a megaron (FIG. 4-18) with a formal throne room that may also have been used to host feasting rituals involving elite members of the community. Including a porch and vestibule facing the courtyard, the Pylos megaron was a magnificent display of architectural and decorative skill. The reconstruction in FIGURE 4-19 shows how it might have looked. Every inch was painted—floors, ceilings, beams, and door frames with brightly colored abstract designs, and walls with paintings of large mythical animals and highly stylized plant and landscape forms. Flanking the throne (on the back wall of the reconstruction) are monumental paintings of lions and griffins. A circular hearth sits in the middle, set into a floor finished with plaster painted with imitations of stone and tile patterns. There was a spot in the megaron where priests and priestesses poured libations to a deity from a ceremonial rhyton, fostering communication between the people of Pylos and their god(s).

Clay tablets found in the ruins of the palace include an inventory of its elegant furnishings. The listing on one tablet reads: “One ebony chair with golden back decorated with birds; and a footstool decorated with ivory pomegranates. One ebony chair with ivory back carved with a pair of finials and with a man’s figure and heifers; one footstool, ebony inlaid with ivory and pomegranates.”

**4-19 •  
RECONSTRUCTION  
DRAWING OF THE  
MEGARON (GREAT  
ROOM) OF THE PYLOS  
PALACE**

c. 1300–1200 BCE. Watercolor  
by Piet de Jong.

English artist Piet de Jong (1887–1967) began his career as an architect, but his service in the post-World War I reconstruction of Greece inspired him to focus his talents on recording and reconstructing Greek archaeological excavations. In 1922, Arthur Evans called him to work on the reconstructions at Knossos, and Piet de Jong spent the rest of his life creating fanciful but archaeologically informed visions of the original appearance of some of the greatest twentieth-century discoveries of ancient Greece and the Aegean during a long association with the British School of Archaeology in Athens.





## RECOVERING THE PAST | The “Mask of Agamemnon”

One of Heinrich Schliemann’s most amazing and famous discoveries in the shaft graves in Mycenae was a solid gold mask placed over the face of a body he claimed was the legendary Agamemnon, uncovered on November 30, 1876. But Schliemann’s identification of the mask with this king of Homeric legend has been disproven, and even the authenticity of the mask itself has been called into question over the last 30 years.

Doubts are rooted in a series of stylistic features that separate this mask (FIG. 4-20) from the other four excavated by Schliemann in Grave Circle A—the treatment of the eyes and eyebrows, the cut-out separation of the ears from the flap of gold around the face, and most strikingly the beard and handlebar mustache that have suspicious parallels with nineteenth-century fashion in facial hair. Suspicions founded on such anomalies are reinforced by Schliemann’s own history of deceit and embellishment when characterizing his life and discoveries, not to mention his freewheeling excavation practices, when judged against current archaeological standards.

Some specialists have claimed a middle ground between genuine or fake for the mask, suggesting that the artifact itself may be authentic, but that Schliemann quickly subjected it to an overzealous restoration to make the face of “Agamemnon” seem more heroic and noble—at least to viewers in his own day—than the faces of the four other Mycenaean funerary masks. But another scholar has argued that, in fact, this particular mask is not the one Schliemann associated with Agamemnon, undercutting some of the principal arguments for questioning its authenticity in the first place.

The resolution of these questions awaits a full scientific study to determine the nature of the alloy (gold was regularly mixed with small amounts of other metals to make it stronger) from which this mask was made, as well as a microscopic analysis of its technique and the appearance of its surface.



**4-20 • “MASK OF AGAMEMNON”**

Funerary mask, from Shaft Grave v, Grave Circle A, Mycenae, Greece. c. 1600–1550 BCE. Gold, height approx. 12” (35 cm). National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

### MYCENAEAN TOMBS

**SHAFT GRAVES** Tombs were given much greater prominence in the Helladic culture of the mainland than they were by the Minoans, and ultimately they became the most architecturally sophisticated monuments of the entire Aegean Bronze Age. The earliest burials were in **shaft graves**, vertical pits 20 to 25 feet deep. In Mycenae, the graves of important people were enclosed in a circle of standing stone slabs. In these graves, the ruling families laid out their dead in opulent dress and jewelry and surrounded them with ceremonial weapons (see FIG. 4-21), gold and silver wares, and other articles indicative of their status, wealth, and power.

Among the 30 pounds of gold objects archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann found in the shaft graves of Mycenae were five funerary masks, and he identified one of these golden treasures as the face of Agamemnon, commander-in-chief of the Greek forces in Homer’s account of the Trojan War (see “The Mask of Agamemnon,” above). We now know these masks have nothing to do with the heroes of the Trojan War since the Mycenae graves are about 300 years older than Schliemann believed, and the burial practices they display were different from those described by Homer.

Also found in these shaft graves were bronze **DAGGER BLADES** (FIG. 4-21) decorated with inlaid scenes, further attesting to the wealth of the bellicose Mycenaean ruling elite. To form the



**4-21 • DAGGER BLADE WITH LION HUNT**

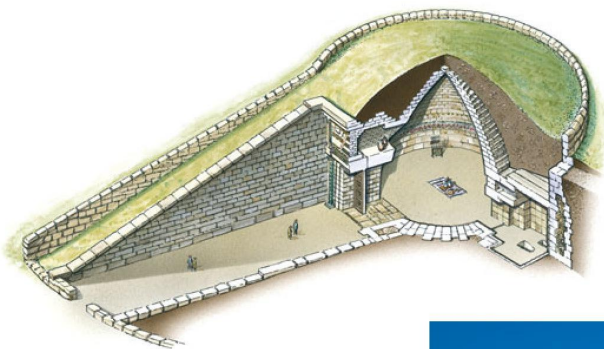
From Shaft Grave iv, Grave Circle A, Mycenae, Greece. c. 1550–1500 BCE. Bronze inlaid with gold, silver, and niello, length 9 $\frac{3}{8}$ ” (23.8 cm). National Archaeological Museum, Athens.



decoration of daggers like this, Mycenaean artists cut shapes out of different-colored metals (copper, silver, and gold), inlaid them in the bronze blade, and then added fine details in niello (see “Aegean Metalwork,” page 90). In Homer’s *Iliad*, the poet describes similar decoration on Agamemnon’s armor and Achilles’ shield. The blade shown here depicts four lunging hunters—Minoan in style—attacking a charging lion who has already downed one of their companions who lies under the lion’s front legs. Two other lions retreat in full flight. Like the bull in the Minoan fresco (see FIG. 4-7), these fleeing animals stretch out in the “flying-gallop” pose to indicate speed and energy.

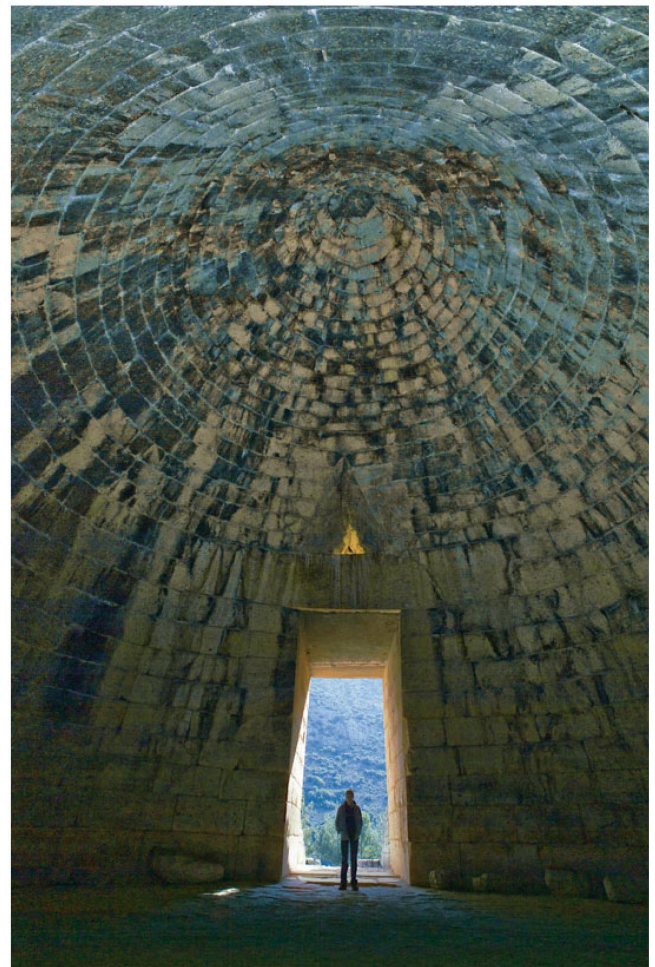
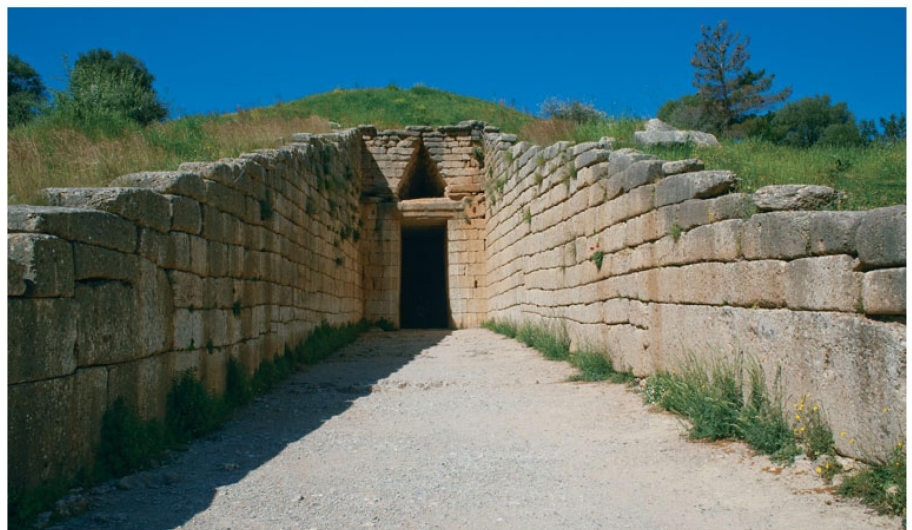
**THOLOS TOMBS** By about 1600 BCE, members of the elite class on the mainland had begun building large above-ground burial places commonly referred to as **tholos** tombs (popularly known as **beehive tombs** because of their rounded, conical shape). More than 100 such tombs have been found, nine of them in the vicinity of Mycenae. Possibly the most impressive is the so-called **TREASURY OF ATREUS** (FIGS. 4-22, 4-23), which dates from about 1300 to 1200 BCE.

A walled passageway through the earthen mound covering the tomb, about 114 feet long and 20 feet wide and open to the sky, led to the entrance, which was 34 feet high, with a door




**4-22 • CUTAWAY DRAWING OF THOLOS, THE SO-CALLED TREASURY OF ATREUS**

**4-23 • EXTERIOR VIEW OF THOLOS, THE SO-CALLED TREASURY OF ATREUS**  
Mycenae, Greece. c. 1300–1200 BCE.



**4-24 • CORBEL VAULT, INTERIOR OF THOLOS, THE SO-CALLED TREASURY OF ATREUS**  
Limestone vault, height approx. 43' (13 m), diameter 47'6" (14.48 m).

 **Watch** an architectural simulation of the corbel vault on [myartslab.com](http://myartslab.com)



16½ feet high, faced with bronze plaques. On either side of the entrance were columns created from a green stone found near Sparta, and carved with decoration. The section above the lintel had smaller engaged columns on each side, and the relieving triangle was disguised behind a red-and-green engraved marble panel. The main tomb chamber (FIG. 4-24) is a circular room 47½ feet in diameter and 43 feet high. It is roofed with a **corbeled vault** built up in regular **courses**, or layers, of **ashlar**—precisely cut blocks of stone—smoothly leaning inward and carefully calculated to meet in a single capstone (topmost stone that joins sides and completes structure) at the peak. Covered with earth, the tomb became a conical hill. It was a remarkable engineering feat.

## CERAMIC ARTS

In the final phase of the Helladic Bronze Age, Mycenaean potters created highly refined ceramics. A large **krater**—a bowl for mixing water and wine, used both in feasts and as grave markers—is an example of the technically sophisticated wares being produced on the Greek mainland between 1300 and 1100 BCE. Decorations could be highly stylized, like the scene of marching men on the **WARRIOR KRATER** (FIG. 4-25). On the side shown here, a woman at the far left bids farewell to a group of helmeted men marching off to the right, with lances and large shields. The vibrant energy of the Harvester Rhyton or the Vapheio Cup has changed to the regular rhythm inspired by the tramping feet of disciplined warriors. The only indication of the woman's emotions is the gesture of an arm raised to her head, a symbol of mourning. The men are seemingly interchangeable parts in a rigidly disciplined war machine.



**4-25 • WARRIOR KRATER**

From Mycenae, Greece. c. 1300–1100 BCE. Ceramic, height 16" (41 cm). National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

The succeeding centuries, between about 1100 and 900 BCE, were a time of transformation in the Aegean, marked by less political, economic, and artistic complexity and control. A new culture was forming, one that looked back upon the exploits of the Helladic warrior-kings as the glories of a heroic age, while setting the stage for a new Greek civilization.

## THINK ABOUT IT

- 4.1** Choose a picture or sculpture of a human figure from two of the ancient Aegean cultures examined in this chapter. Characterize how the artist represents the human form and how that representation could be related to the cultural significance of the works in their original context.
- 4.2** Assess the methods of two archaeologists whose work is discussed in this chapter. How have they recovered, reconstructed, and interpreted the material culture of the Aegean Bronze Age?
- 4.3** What explanations have art historians proposed for the use and cultural significance of the elegant figures of women that have been excavated in the Cyclades?
- 4.4** Compare the plans of the architectural complexes at Knossos and Mycenae. How have the arrangements of the buildings aided archaeologists in speculating on the way in which these complexes were related to their cultural context and ritual or political use?

## CROSSCURRENTS



FIG. 3-34



FIG. 4-1

Discuss the differences in style between these two works of ancient painting. Attend to the distinct modes of representing human figures as well as to the ways those figures are related to their surroundings. Is there a possible relationship between the architectural context and the style of presentation?

✓ [Study and review on myartslab.com]